

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-05 H-01

L-01 NSC-05 PM-03 IO-06 NSAE-00 SP-02 PA-01

NEA-07 EUR-08 EB-04 HA-02 /064 W

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FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1006

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SANA

COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 0882

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PDEV, ET, SO, DJ, ELTN

SUBJECT: THE ADDIS-DJIBOUTI RAILROAD

REF: A) DJIBOUTI 0824, B) DJIBOUTI 0825, C) STATE 149322

1. AT LEAST TWO COMPLETE TRANSITS OF THE RAILROAD FROM DJIBOUTI TO ADDIS ABABA HAVE BEEN MADE IN THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS. ACCORDING TO THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR, THE FIRST RUN FROM ADDIS CAME AS FAR AS THE DJIBOUTI BORDER, BUT WAS TURNED BACK BECAUSE IT WAS CARRYING A LARGE NUMBER OF ETHIOPIAN MILITARY AND ABOUT 150 RAILROAD WORKERS NONE OF WHOM HAD BEEN CLEARED WITH THE GROD. PRESIDENT GOULED INSISTED THAT IF THE TRAIN NEEDED PROTECTION IN THE ROD, SUCH PRO-
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TECTION WOULD NOT BE PROVIDED BY FOREIGN TROOPS.

2. PLANS TO SEND A DJIBOUTI DELEGATION TO ADDIS PRIMARILY TO NEGOTIATE A REVISED UNDERSTANDING ON THE RAILROAD HAVE ALSO BEEN CONFIRMED. THE DELEGATION WILL BE HEADED BY MOHAMED DJAMA ELABE, MINISTER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM AND MOUMIN BAHDON FARAH, MINISTER

OF INTERIOR. THE PRIME MINISTER, ABDALLAH MOHAMED KAMIL, WILL NOT BE A MEMBER OF THE DELEGATION.

3. DESPITE THIS MORE-OR-LESS SUCCESSFUL COMMENCEMENT, THE CONTINUED SECURITY OF THE RAILWAY REMAINS IN DOUBT, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE ATTEMPTS AGAINST IT BY THE WESTERN SOMALI LIBERATION FRONT, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PMGSE AND THE ISSA SOMALI COMMUNITY THROUGH WHICH MUCH OF THE RAILWAY PASSES. WHILE SOME RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THESE GROUPS HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, IT IS STILL OF A TENUOUS NATURE, A POINT MADE IN RECENT CONVERSATIONS BY BOTH THE DJIBOUTI MINISTER OF INTERIOR (AN ISSA) AND BY THE WIFE OF THE OUGAZ OF THE ISSAS, THE HEREDITARY CHIEF WHO HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN THE PRIMARY INSTRUMENT OF THE PMGSE IN BRINGING ABOUT A RECONCILIATION WITH THE ISSA POPULATION. MADAM OUGAZ, WHO WAS FEARFUL THAT HER CALL AT THE EMBASSY WOULD BECOME KNOWN, EXPLAINED THAT HER HUSBAND HAD TOLD THE ETHIOPIAN AUTHORITIES THAT THE RAILROAD COULD NOT BE SAFEGUARDED IF THE ISSAS WERE DRIVEN INTO OPPOSITION. HE HAS INSISTED THAT A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF AUTONOMY BE GRANTED WHEREIN THE ISSA RELIGION AND CULTURE (INCLUDING, PRESUMABLY, THE ROLE OF THE OUGAZ) ARE RESPECTED AND THE POPULATION NOT SUBJECT TO ARBITRARY ARREST OR EXECUTION. MADAM OUGAZ INDICATED THAT WHILE THESE CONDITIONS WERE BEING GENERALLY FULFILLED FOR THE MOMENT, THERE WAS AS YET NO SENSE OF HAVING RECEIVED A CREDIBLE GUARANTEE OVER THE

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LONGER TERM. WHEN IT WAS PUT TO HER THAT THE FUNCTIONING OF THE RAILROAD WAS IN THE ISSA INTEREST IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THAT ITS INTERRUPTION MIGHT PROVOKE ETHIOPIAN REPRISALS, SHE AGREED, BUT INSISTED THAT IF ISSA AUTONOMY WERE NOT RESPECTED, THE LOCAL POPULATION WOULD REACT AGAINST THE RAILROAD DESPITE THE CONSEQUENCES.

4. EMBASSY DJIBOUTI BELIEVES WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO MAKE SURE THAT SOMALI GOVERNMENT UNDERSTANDS THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO THE FUNCTIONING OF THE RAILROAD. HOWEVER, IN LIGHT OF PARAGRAPH 3, WE NOTE THAT ONE CANNOT AUTOMATICALLY ASSUME THAT ANY INTERRUPTION OF THE RAILROAD IS NECESSARILY THE WORK OF THE WSLF OR THAT THE SOMALI GOVERNMENT CAN NECESSARILY BE HELD RESPONSIBLE. IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT INTERRUPTION OF THE RAILROAD WOULD BE ENCOURAGED BY AN AFAR GROUP SEEKING TO EXACERBATE RELATIONS BETWEEN DJIBOUTI AND ETHIOPIA. THE MOUVEMENT POPULAIRE DE LIBERATION, FOR EXAMPLE, CAN COUNT ON ETHIOPIAN FINANCING ONLY SO LONG AS ETHIOPIA NEEDS A STICK WITH WHICH TO THREATEN THE G.O.D. AND IF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS GROW TOO FRIENDLY, DJIBOUTI AFARS RISK LOSING THEIR MAJOR BARGAINING CHIP, THE THREAT OF CALLING ON ETHIOPIAN SUPPORT TO DISRUPT THE ISSA-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT

HERE. IN SUMMATION WHILE THE DANGER FROM MOGADISCIO MAY BE
THE MOST IMMEDIATE, THE RAILROAD IS HOSTAGE TO MORE THAN ONE
GROUP IN THIS CORNER OF THE HORN OF AFRICA.
SCOTT

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